



Building a sustainable health community in East Surrey: Understanding the impact and implementation of Growing Health Together

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Public Summary:

Growing Health Together (GHT) is a collaborative partnership based in East Surrey. Together, local people, health and care professionals, the voluntary sector and community organisations build upon existing strengths and community assets to set up and deliver opportunities outside of the NHS to improve well-being and prevent ill health. This approach is called 'community-led health creation'.

Interest in this approach is increasing, with national policies emphasising the importance of community-based solutions to health inequalities. Hence, there is a need to gather evidence on the factors contributing to the approach's success, identify potential barriers, and understand who benefits and who may not.

To gather this evidence, we spoke to 49 individuals involved with GHT. These included local people responsible for organising groups, community members participating in an activity, GPs who led the partnership, and representatives from health and care organisations. Findings showed that building connections and relationships was critical to the partnership's successful set-up, delivery, and maintenance. Positive changes attributed to GHT included the establishment of new networks across East Surrey and improved communication between organisations. Community members who attended activities reported improvements in mental well-being, physical health, and knowledge about health conditions. Some also reported feeling less socially isolated and lonely.

Recommendations include adopting the GHT ethos of flexibility, inclusivity, and active listening to ensure the community's voices are heard. At the outset, programme leads need to identify the unmet needs - what do people living in these communities want- and do this by engaging with established community connectors.



Public and Community Involvement :

A public co-applicant was involved at the application stage to ensure that community perspectives were embedded at the earliest opportunity and throughout the project's duration. A Public Advisory Group ('PAG') was set up at the outset of the evaluation, which involved 7 diverse individuals living and working in East Surrey who met regularly to inform and help shape the research at key stages. Their input was invaluable and included assisting with identifying local needs, refining the research design and methods, and promoting the work, including writing blog posts. Their involvement demonstrated the project's commitment to amplifying the voices of marginalised groups.

Dissemination:

Dr Sarah Hotham and Dr Gillian Orow have presented the GHT programme and evaluation at ARC KSS events. Plans are in place to expand the reach across health and social care organisations, including NHS England.

An interactive web-based resource has been developed which sets out a framework of 'active ingredients' that those wishing to implement a GHT or similar health creation approach should consider. This will be launched in early 2025.

Impact and Implementation:

The outcomes of the evaluation demonstrated that GHT led to improved health and wellbeing (physical, mental and social), improved health literacy and enhanced engagement with healthcare, which strengthens existing prevention work and could lead to future long-term cost benefits for the NHS.

The findings, recommendation and outputs of the project provide guidance for those working with communities in relation to empowering individuals to manage their own health. The research team is working with the GHT Director, ARC KSS and other health and social care partners to identify relevant opportunities to inform policy and practice and to broaden the reach of the programme further.

Publications

Publications will be available in 2025. Further information can be found at: [Growing Health Together - Research at Kent](#) and [Growing Health Together](#)

What next?

The launch of the web-based resource of 'active ingredients' to consider for wider implementation of GHT will take place in early 2025, alongside discussions with key people in health and social care delivery and commissioning to inform future practice